

## **A Friend of Bill's – Prologue**

“Get out of here, we know about your kind. You're just a drunk, nothing but trailer trash from the wrong side of town.”

The sign said: “No Bums Allowed”

I wasn't hurt or angry, they just forgot: “God didn't make no junk.” Man did I want a drink. These were tough times, there wasn't any work to be had and few people had anything to share. I was sober; I hadn't had a drink in, hmm, 87 days? Or, was it 88 days? I wouldn't know without seeing a calendar. I guess I just got sick and tired of being sick and tired.

It hadn't always been like that; I'd been very successful. Married, 2 children, a boy, Robbie, and a girl Ellen. I went to Church every Sunday morning and taught in the Children's Sunday School. Julie, my wife, always said how much she wanted to go see her family. They lived in Los Angeles. We lived in Boston. She saved money and eventually had enough for 3 round trip tickets. I wanted to go but couldn't get the time off. Next year Robbie would start Kindergarten, and Julie said that if they didn't go now, who knew when they could go.

American Airlines Flight 11, departing Logan at 8am on September 11<sup>th</sup>. It was the first time in an airplane for any of the three of them. I couldn't even get time off to take them to the airport. I didn't work for Simon Legree, but my boss and he were probably related.

You know the rest, right?

## A Friend of Bill's – Chapter 1

“Did you hear the news, Bob? A plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center.”

“Get out of here, something like that can't happen.”

“Really, it happened around 8:45. The boss put on the TV and said that everyone should watch the news.”

They stood transfixed watching CNN. At 9:03 United Airlines flight 175 crashed into the south tower. Just before 10, the Associated Press announced that American Airlines Flight 11 was apparently hijacked. At 11:16, American Airlines confirmed the loss of two of its aircraft. Bob didn't hear the announcements confirming the crashes of Flight 11 and Flight 77 (Pentagon). He was on the phone on hold listening to a recording; the phones at American Airlines were swamped.

At 11:25 Bob's boss came into his cubical and said, “Bob I'm so sorry, it's been confirmed. The plane that crashed into the north tower was the flight your family was on. If there is anything I can do, let me know. Take as much time as you need.”

“Sorry? Sorry? I'm going to Logan.”

“Take as much time as you need.”

Logan was a mad house. Eventually Bob made his way to a counter and told the representative that his wife and children were on Flight 11. He was taken to a conference room and American representatives told him what they knew, which wasn't much. Numb to the core, Bob went to the long-term parking lot and found their car. He used his spare key to open the car and sat down in the seat. And started crying. If only...

Two days later, Bob received an envelope in the mail. Julie had bought flight insurance, a lot of flight insurance. Bob folded the policies and put them in his wallet. This wasn't the time to be thinking about money. A few days later, American Airlines contacted Bob about a settlement of any possible claims against the airline.

Eleven days after the September 11 disaster, Congress passed emergency airline bailout legislation designed to provide unprecedented financial/liability protection for domestic air carriers. In its rush to act, Congress left many other elements of the aviation industry unprotected. Unfortunately, extreme pressure to act precipitously may also have created unnecessary problems for those who must implement the well-intended protection of Congress. Airline managers may succeed in restoring pre-September flight schedules. The people of the United States may return to flying rather than fearing. Will the bailout/liability protection measures work to protect the airlines against financial disaster because of \$10 to \$15 billion of lawsuits?

The airline bailout “Act” of September 22, 2001, guarantees the following protection for the airlines:

- Disaster relief loans up to \$10 billion. (Interestingly, there has been only one taker so far, America West, which just about everyone agrees will be one of the first carriers to fail, if any do.);
- Financial compensation to \$5 billion for direct and incremental losses. (Money to stem the flow of green blood caused by terrorists, not financial losses due to poor management);
- Special support to ensure scheduled air service to outlying communities. (the safest routes);
- Reimbursements of premium increases by aviation insurers. (Who gets this money? Will the airline insurers promise not to include terrorist-caused loss exclusions in their policies at renewal?);
- A commitment to spend \$3 billion on airline safety and security. (Better late than never.);
- Special limitations on air carrier liability regardless of fault. (What if the factual accident reports of the September 11 terrorist crashes reveal clear airline negligence?);  
An airline liability cap on all compensatory and punitive damage claims arising out of the crashes. No air carrier shall be liable in an amount greater than the liability insurance coverage maintained by the air carrier on September 11. (United and American reportedly each had \$3.2 billion dollars coverage on September 11.);
- A government insurance umbrella for air carriers, their vendors and subcontractors for third-party losses due to terrorism. The umbrella covers losses in excess of \$100 million, during the 180-day period from the passage of the Act. (Perhaps this provision should be called the aviation insurance company stop-loss benefit?);
- A new and exclusive federal cause of action controlling all lawsuits arising out of the terrorist-related crashes of September 11. (No creative lawsuits in state and federal courts.);
- Original and exclusive jurisdiction for all September 11 lawsuits in the US Federal District Court located in Manhattan, NY (Defendants will all be in “one court,” before “one” set of judges, with jurors drawn from “one” district – the “one” encompassing the scene of the disaster. “One” question: How does the court find unbiased jurors?);
- A Victim Compensation Fund run by the US Justice Department with no spending limit, designed to generously and rapidly compensate victims if they do not sue the airlines.

Julie, Ellen and Robbie were dead. People wanted to talk about money? At least if they'd been killed in a car crash, I'd have someone to bury. All of the money in the world won't bring them back. One of the other family members who had lost someone on Flight 11 wanted to get together to talk about what they should do, sue or file a claim. They met in a supper club and the other man, John, offered a round of drinks. Bob accepted. Three hours of conversation and about 5 drinks later they hadn't decided anything. This was the first drink Bob had taken since before 9/11. The alcohol seemed to dull the pain. On the way home, Bob decided to get a nightcap at a bar about 1 block from their home. He didn't get home until 1am, but at least he had the sense to walk the block and not drive.

Bob consulted an attorney and believe it or not, the attorney advised him to file a claim. Because of the new law enacted by Congress, it might be years before a lawsuit would produce any results. Bob dug the insurance policies out of his wallet and handed it to the attorney.

"What about these policies?"

"There are certain formalities that have to be attended to, Bob. If you'd like, I'll handle it for you for a flat fee."

Strange lawyer didn't want to sue and would handle the insurance claims with the 3rd party carrier for a flat fee? If Bob wanted, he'd attend to filing the claim with the government, again for a flat fee. Bob told him to go ahead. The attorney was only charging Bob his costs or what he estimated to be his costs. A few weeks later, Bob received a call from the attorney to come by the office and sign some papers. When he got there, the attorney had checks from the 3rd party carrier.

"That's a lot of money Bob and you still have your claim with the government. Do you have any idea what you might do with it?"

"It's blood money. I can't spend it; I guess I'll invest it."

"How are you getting along?"

"Some friends and neighbors went through the house and took all of their clothes and everything and donated it to charity. The house is so empty; I think maybe I'll sell it and move somewhere that I won't have to live with all of these memories."

"Here's a card for an investment counselor I've worked with a few times. He's very good, but a little conservative. Still, he'll get you a fair return on your money."

"What do you think of what Bush did in attacking Afghanistan?"

"If they can find bin Laden, good; if not, I'm worried that it might lead to something bigger."

“I’ll give this guy a call. How long on the claim?”

“I’ll file the claim for you tomorrow and it won’t be more than 120 days.”

“What do I do, write you a check or what?”

“We can settle up when you receive the money on your claim.”

Bob met with the investment counselor the following day. The guy was very conservative and recommended government bonds since Bob wasn’t interested in income from the insurance. Bob told him to go ahead and endorsed the insurance checks. He stopped for a drink at the neighborhood bar on the way home. He ended up closing the place, the thought that the lives of his family had been reduced to 3 pieces of paper grated at him. He walked home, and fell into bed, fully dressed.

“Bob, I’m sorry, but I’m afraid that I’ve given you all of the time I can. I need you back at work.”

“I can’t come back, I’m sorry. Can you use my accumulated vacation to cover 2 weeks’ notice?”

“Under the circumstance, yes. Please come by and clean out your desk and I’ll have your final check. What are you going to do, Bob?”

“I’m waiting on the claim I filed with the government. I listed the house and am leaving Boston.”

“Where are you going?”

“Maybe see the country. I haven’t really decided.”

“Have you had an opportunity to visit with a grief counselor?”

“What for, will he bring my family back?”

“No, but I sense you’re not coping very well.”

“I’ll be in tomorrow and clean out my desk. I have to go now.”

Click.

Financially, Bob was in pretty fair shape. He’d given the \$5,000 insurance policies on each of the kids and the \$50,000 policy on Julie to the attorney who attached the death certificates and filed the life insurance claims. The insurance carrier had paid the claims in a matter of days and he’d been living on the money. The attorney had also taken care

of providing the DNA evidence to the investigators trying to identify the bodies. It wasn't much, 3 hairbrushes containing hair.

The next day, Bob went by the office, cleaned out his desk and thanked everyone for their consideration. He stopped by the bar on the way home to cash his last check. He closed the bar, again. His boss had given him a business card for the counselor the company retained for personnel matters. The card went into his wallet.

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Three months later, the attorney called. He had the settlement check from the government. It was about triple what the check had been from the travel insurance carrier. Bob wrote the attorney a check and went to see the investment counsel the following day. This money too went into the same investment account. Bob wanted no part of that 'blood money'.

The house sold at a decent profit, despite the poor economy. Bob called a charity and told them to pick up the furniture – he wanted to donate everything. The United States opened Operation Iraqi Freedom...

## A Friend of Bill's – Chapter 2

Bob cut off the phone and utilities, went by the companies to pay the final bills and cancelled his only credit card. He dumped his clothes into the suitcases and got a motel. He couldn't spend another night in that house. He went to a bar and got really, really drunk. The bartender had to help him back to his motel room. He overslept and almost missed the closing of the house sale. He had felt better. His mouth was cotton and he felt yucky all over. He took the settlement check to the bank and talked with the manager. If he could wait 3 days, they could convert the check into cash. For the moment, they could only give him \$5,000. Bob took the 5 grand and went back to the motel. He told the front desk that his plans had changed and he would be staying another 3 days.

Then, he went looking for some hair of the dog that had bit him. The bartender cut him off a little early, but at least he was able to get back to his room. He hadn't eaten a thing all day. He undressed, showered and fell into bed. And that's the way it went every one of the 3 days after that, except he got breakfast each morning. On the third day he checked out of his motel and went to the bank. The bank manager cautioned him about carrying that much cash. Bob told him he'd be ok and he was off, going nowhere in a hurry.

Bob was very foolish driving around with that much cash. We are talking a low 6 figures, most of it in \$100 bills. He was in a rut and it was only getting deeper. It seemed that each day he left a little later and each evening he stopped a little earlier. Some days he was so sick he couldn't drive. He'd lie over, get cleaned up, eat a meal and lay off the sauce for that day. The United States made it to Baghdad in 3 weeks. Bob didn't care. He was a kite, blowing in the wind and unattached to any strings. He sensed, rather than knew, that he had to put down roots or go stark raving crazy. For one thing, maybe he was drinking a little too much; maybe he'd better cut back.

He found himself one morning in Des Moines, Iowa. Where in the hell was Des Moines Iowa? Bob decided that nowhere was as good a place as any to put down some roots. He got a copy of the Des Moines Register and started looking for a furnished apartment. He found one in the vicinity of Drake University. It wasn't much, but it was home for the time being. You'll always find a lot of bars around a college. He found a place he liked on Forest Avenue named Peggy's and run by a fella called Boots. It was a beer joint, not a place selling mixed drinks. That was ok because Bob needed to back off a little anyway. Who ever heard of anyone getting drunk drinking beer?

Boots had to be 75 years old. He owned Peggy's and it was a very successful beer joint that only catered to the college crowd. When Iowa had gone to liquor by the drink in 1965, Boots had decided to cater only to the college crowd and never got a liquor license to sell mixed drinks. Bob was sitting in Peggy's one evening and Boots had the TV on. The date was September 11, 2003. They replayed the planes crashing into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, one more time. Bob blanched, just as he always did and asked Boots where he could get a mixed drink. Boots recommended a little

place a couple of blocks down the street. Bob chugged his beer and took off. He found the bar and ordered a double gin on the rocks.

The next morning he woke up in the drunk tank at the Polk County jail. A deputy told him he'd been arrested for public intoxication after getting in a fight with someone outside of a bar on Forest Avenue. They loaded him into the back of a squad car and took him to see a magistrate. He paid his fine and the Deputy dropped him off in the same place he'd been arrested. He sloughed down the street to Peggy's and got there just as Boot's was opening for the day.

"Beer?"

"Sure."

"What happened to you last night? We were watching TV and you went as white as a ghost," Boot's said.

"My family was on the plane that crashed into the north tower."

"God, I'm sorry. If I'd have known I'd have changed the channel."

"Do you think I'm a drunk?"

"Not my place to say. You really get into the sauce some nights. Look Bob, I'm in the business to sell beer. That's what I do for a living and have since the early 1960's. I don't need your money that bad. All of these young kids I get in here most nights buy beer as fast as we can pour it. You wouldn't be the first customer I've driven off and I doubt you will be the last. How about I make a phone call for you and have a guy come and pick you up?"

"To go where?"

"A place they call the White House."

"Is it a bar?"

"They only serve coffee and soft drinks."

"Well, I guess, it couldn't hurt just one time. I spent the night in jail and got fined \$80 and costs by a magistrate."

"I'll call a fella named Jim and he'll come by and pick you up. How about a cup of coffee?"

Like many states, Iowa has a dram shop law. Dram shop laws generally make a bar owners liable for the behavior of their customers if they've had too much to drink and



get into accident. Dram shop laws make it possible for bar owners and alcohol servers to be held financially liable if a customer becomes obviously intoxicated on their premises and subsequently injures someone or causes property damage, typically by driving drunk.

So, if a person has several alcoholic drinks at a restaurant or bar and is visibly intoxicated, and then gets in a car and kills someone on the way home, the owner of the serving establishment can be sued for damages. The question that inevitably arises in court pertains to how visibly drunk the patron was before he or she got in the car. Would a reasonable person be able to tell that the patron was obviously drunk? There are currently 43 states (and Washington DC) in the US with dram shop laws and 8 states without them.

In the late 1960's Boots had learned all about Dram shop laws, the hard way. When you've run a bar for 40 years, you know when a customer is drunk. He managed to hang onto Peggy's, barely. Boots didn't need the grief. His usual procedure was to permanently 86 a guy who couldn't handle his liquor. Maybe it was just conscience, but occasionally Boots would call a fella he knew at the White House and get the customer some help. Boots sort of felt guilty for Bob seeing the anniversary show the evening before. Not terribly guilty but he could see where Bob was headed. He called Jim and Jim came by and picked up Bob.

The White House is an AA Club located at 1400 (not 1600) Pennsylvania Avenue in Des Moines, Iowa. The number is (515) 266-9478. When no one answers that phone, you can always call the White House Kitchen (515) 262-2884.

"Hi, I'm Jim."

"Bob."

"Buy you a cup of coffee?"

For the next 3 hours, Bob poured out the entire story to Jim in the White House Kitchen. He told Jim that he was as much humoring Boots as anything. That maybe he was a heavy drinker who sometimes went a little overboard. But, he certainly wasn't an alcoholic. Jim challenged him to the test.

"With all that you've been through, I can certainly understand what got you started, Bob. The thing is, how many people do you know that have ended up in a drunk tank? It is only a symptom, nothing more. Why don't you take the test and find out if you're a problem drinker or an alcoholic?"

"What kind of test?"

"You'll love it; you get to drink, Bob. Just one thing, you can only drink one beer a day for the next 30 days."

“Hell, one beer, that’s easy.”

“You can’t save them up or anything. You have to drink just one beer every day for the next 30 days.”

“I can do that, it will be easy.”

“If you can, you’re a better man than me, Bob.”

Bob started the test and did well, for a couple of days. After that, he would go to Peggy’s get his one beer and then amble down the street to the other bar. He’d have a beer there and then walk to a bar on University Avenue and have a third beer. It became a circuit. Every day, 6 days a week he’d make the circuit, getting one beer at 6 different taverns or bars. On Saturdays he’d pick up a six-pack at the last bar and drink in his apartment on Sundays. He hadn’t given Jim his phone number or address.

“Boots this is Jim.”

“Hey Jim, what’s up?”

“Bob been in?”

“Every night that I’m open he comes in sober, has one beer and then leaves. However, from the looks of his face, he’s going somewhere else and getting more to drink. Did you put him on the one beer a day thing?”

“He wasn’t convinced he’s an alcoholic.”

“Is he?”

“If he’s going someplace else to drink after he goes to Peggy’s and has his one beer, I’d bet on it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing. He’s not ready.”

“I’m going to 86 him, I don’t need the grief.”

“That’s up to you, Boots. Gotta run. Bye.”

“Bye.”

“Gimme a draft.”

“Sorry Bob, you’re 86’d, permanently.”

“Why, I haven’t come in here drunk one time and I only have one beer?”

“Sorry Bob, that’s my decision. Talked to Jim lately?”

“Did he call you and put you up to this?”

“Peggy’s is my bar, Bob. Nobody put me up to anything. I think you have a problem and I don’t need the grief.”

“I’ve been kicked out of better bars than this one.”

“Name one.”

“I’m leaving.”

“Don’t let the door hit you on…”

Bob was pissed. God wasn’t fair. He’d taken his family and now He was taking the one thing that let him hold onto his sanity. Bob wasn’t hurting anybody but himself. What did anybody care?”

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Time out.

Bob, God cares. However, He gave all of us free will. If we want to kill ourselves with booze, God won’t stop us. Anyone who can’t drink one beer a day, each and every day, for 30 days probably has a serious drinking problem and is likely an alcoholic. The way God set it up is that if we have a drinking problem, e.g., alcoholism, we have to ask Him to help us stop drinking. He’ll help, but only if we let Him.

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“Gimme a draft.”

“Getting cold out.”

“I didn’t notice. How about you pour and I’ll drink?”

“Buck fifty.”

“Don’t you have anything cheaper?”

“Buck fifty, that is the cheap beer.”

“Keep the change.”

“I’ll open a new bank account.”

“I don’t need your smart mouth.”

“And we don’t need your business. Drink up and get out.”

It was the same bar that Bob had been arrested in front of about 6 weeks earlier. The owner of the bar had told the bartenders that if Bob raised any fuss to 86 him. Boots’ brother owned the bar – maybe that explains the instruction. Boots’ brother had never been sued. However, he made it possible for Boots’ to hang on to Peggy’s.

It could have ended right there. In fact, I’m certain that it should have ended right there. Real life isn’t like the movies, sorry. Bob found another bar. A fella by the name of Joe ran this one and it became his regular hang out. The only thing was it seemed like Joe was hard of hearing. Sometimes he’d have to ask 2 or 3 times for a refill. He still wasn’t working and he was eating into his money pretty good by this time.

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You may have guessed that Bob was educated. He had a job with a cubical suggesting that he was a professional or semi-professional of some kind, definitely an office worker. Bob was a college graduate, pulling down a 3.98gpa. He hadn’t joined a fraternity in college and always had his nose in a book, studying. He didn’t have any time for the parties that the others seemed to think were the only reason to go to college in the first place. Consequently, he was 21 before he ever had his first drink, a glass of beer with some pizza. Didn’t think much of the beer at the time and it sort of gave him a funny feeling. So basically, Bob was the sort of man who kept a six-pack in the fridge for company. On his own, that six-pack would have lasted him 6 months, maybe longer.

Julie’s Dad was an alcoholic and she’d had strong opinions on the subject of drinking. What would she think now, if she could see him the way he was? Screw it, Julie was dead. So were Robbie and Ellen. Murdered by some ragheads who wanted to make a statement.

“Hey, Joe, hit me again.”

“Ever think about slowing down a little, Bob? None of my business, but you act like a man who has something bottled up inside of him that he’s using booze to wash out.”

“You’re right Joe; it’s none of your business. However, I could use some conversation; so let me tell you a story. Get yourself a drink while you’re at it.”

“Thanks, Bob, I don’t drink. I have my coffee, that’s enough.”

“You run a bar and you don’t drink?”

“Used to, about like you do. I’m a friend of Bill’s.”

“What’s that mean, Bill who? Anyone I know?”

“Not yet, no. Maybe you’ll get acquainted with him someday.”

“I’ll make it short Joe, my wife and kids were on American Airlines Flight 11 that slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center.”

“And now you have a demon to exorcise, right?”

“I don’t know, maybe. The alcohol dulls the pain.”

“So you got a lot of money from the airlines and decided to retire and wash that demon out of your soul?”

“I got a lot of money, but that wouldn’t bring my family back. It was blood money. I invested every penny. I check with the broker once in a while so he knows I’m still alive, but I won’t touch it. I’d get a job first.”

“Bob, no disrespect, but have you really looked at yourself in a mirror lately? You might have a little trouble getting a job.”

“Bold words, Joe.”

“I call ‘em like I see ‘em Bob.”

“What would you do without my business? Go on welfare?”

“Bob, there are always plenty of customers for a place like this. I’d miss the company, a little, but other than that, don’t let the door hit you on your ass on the way out.”

“Are you 86ing me?”

“No, you want to kill yourself that your business; as long as you aren’t driving. But drinking yourself to death is a hard way to do it.”

“You know I walk.”

“That’s why I serve you. If you were driving, I don’t believe I would.”

“Saying I can’t handle my liquor?”

“Maybe the liquor is handling you, Bob.”

### A Friend of Bill's – Chapter 3

“Hi, Jim, Coffee?”

“Black.”

“How are you doing, Bob, take the test?”

“I guess I flunked.”

“You know where the White House is, any time you're ready.”

“You're not going to lecture me?”

“Would it do any good, Bob? Been there, done that and I have the scars to prove it. You'll either beat booze or it will kill you. Some have to die so others can live.”

“Sounds like a slogan.”

“It's one of many.”

“How can you come into a bar when you're a recovering alcoholic and not drink?”

“I couldn't, not at first. The Big Book tells us to stay away from places we can't handle. But after I got some time in, I could go into a bar and it didn't bother me. Some can and some can't, it's an individual thing.”

“The Big Book? You mean the Bible?”

“No, I mean a book titled Alcoholic Anonymous. We call it The Big Book and in a manner of speaking, it is every recovering alcoholic's Bible. I recommend you read it if you're interested in not drinking.”

“I really do need to cut back, according to Joe. Where would I get a Big Book?”

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Be careful Bob. Are you really sure you want to do this? A fella named Bill Wilson wrote Alcoholic Anonymous. Bill knew all about booze and the effect it had on people. Don't pick up The Big Book unless you really want to quit drinking. Bill sucker punches you by starting off telling his own story. You might be able to identify with Bill and it could ruin your drinking forever. You might still drink, but booze will never taste the same.

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“Joe, do you have any left?”

“Jim, I have a 4th Edition right here. Bob you can have it, but I’ll have to cut you off or you’ll have to read it later. The Big Book and booze don’t mix very well.”

“And this little book is going to make me stop drinking?”

“We didn’t say that. That’s going to be up to you, Bob. However, if you read the book cover to cover, it will ruin your drinking forever. You may still drink, but you probably have a twinge of guilt ever sip you take.”

“I’ll read it later, thanks guys.”

“Have you eaten?” Jim asked.

“I had breakfast.”

“How about I spring for some supper? I’m a little hungry and this is the night they have chicken fried steak at that restaurant on University Avenue.”

“So tell me, did you get it right off the very first time you tried?”

“I wish. I was like a little red rubber ball bouncing in and out of AA for about 6 years. I’d get drunk and in a fight and end up in jail. The judge would sentence me to a fine and a certain number of AA meetings. They give you a Court Card that the Meeting Secretary has to sign for each meeting you attend. That’s how a lot of people get started in AA.”

“So that’s how you got started? Court ordered meetings?”

“I got started in jail, Bob. I was driving drunk and got into an accident. Nobody was killed but I ended up sentenced to jail for a year. The White House sent a group to the jail every week. Jail is no fun and I started to go to the meetings just to have something to do. I got out in 8 months, but by that time I was hooked on AA and had 8 months sober. Here comes the food.”

“Looks good. I guess I don’t eat as regularly as I should.”

“You don’t do a lot of things you should be doing, Bob. You have all of that money you told me about from the sale of your house and the insurance policies. A man needs to keep busy. Having nothing but free time on our hands is our worst enemy.”

“I don’t have a lot of that money left either, now that you mention it.”

“Thinking about going to work?”

“Joe asked me if I’d looked in a mirror lately. I guess I’d have to clean up a little before I went looking for a job.”



“There are about 400 regulars at the White House. People who are sober can get a job in this town. Sometimes, one of the members will give you temporary work while you’re getting yourself back on your feet. You never said what you did for a living.”

“I was a cost accountant.”

“I build tires at the tire plant.”

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“Beer?”

Gimme a coke.”

“Classic or diet?”

“Classic.”

“Stop drinking, Bob?”

“No, but I need to get a job and I did look in the mirror, Joe.”

“This coke is on the house. Read any of the Big Book?”

“The Prefaces and the Doctor’s Opinion.”

“And?”

I don’t know what to think. I do drink too much. But to admit that I’m a servant of a bottle of beer is not easy to do.”

“Do you know about the AMA and THIQ’s?”

“What about the AMA?”

“In 1956 the AMA stated that alcoholism is a disease. There are a lot of theories about the cause of the disease, but the one I like is the explanation that it’s a genetic disorder.”

“How does that work?”

“It is controversial, but it works something like this:

“The liver has a remarkable ability to adjust. In the alcoholic’s liver, the enzymes of the microsomal ethanol oxidizing system (MEOS) gear up and convert alcohol into acetal-

dehydrate twice as fast as the non-alcoholic. This is why the alcoholic can drink so much more than the non-alcoholic.

“The increased rate of conversion to acetaldehyde causes acetaldehyde to build up because the process in the liver responsible for the breakdown of acetaldehyde into acetic acid, cannot keep up.

“Acetaldehyde is a highly toxic compound that damages mitochondria and cell walls. Mitochondria are tiny structures responsible for energy processing in the cell. The buildup of acetaldehyde is at the root of alcohol damage to the body.

“When an alcoholic drinks, acetaldehyde accumulates. This accumulation of acetaldehyde damages liver cells. As the liver works to remove the excess toxic acetaldehyde, cells adapt (in a negative way) and become less able to use nutrients necessary for proper health.

“At some point acetaldehyde levels rise high enough to escape the liver and spill into the bloodstream causing widespread damage. Acetaldehyde is a potent cardiotoxin because it interferes with protein synthesis in the heart.

“When acetaldehyde reaches the brain, it blocks the action of neurotransmitters that are responsible for normal behavior and memory. The brain relies on chemicals called neurotransmitters to bridge the gap between brain cells so that electrical traffic can travel from brain cell to brain cell. Acetaldehyde competes with and actually replaces the neurotransmitters between the brain cells.

“As a result, excess levels of neurotransmitters combine with excess acetaldehyde to form tetrahydroisoquinolines (THIQ’s), compounds that behave very much like opiates. These psychoactive compounds react with endorphin sites in the brain to cause the same pain-killing effects as morphine or heroin.

“Endorphins are powerful chemicals that your brain naturally creates in response to situations where you feel good. Endorphins contribute to feelings of euphoria; they act as a pain regulator, control appetite, and effect the release of sex hormones.

“Prolonged, continuous exercise also increases the release of endorphins. This results in a sense of euphoria that has been popularly labeled ‘runner’s high.’

“Heavy drinkers produce enough THIQ’s to cause the brain to stop producing natural endorphins. When the natural level of endorphins declines, more and more alcohol becomes necessary to maintain a sense of wellbeing.”

“So being an alcoholic is a disease and not a character weakness?”

“Don’t believe me; take it from the AMA, Bob.”

“Could I have a cup of coffee, Joe?”

“Coffee is free too, Bob. Have you been to an AA meeting?”

“I’m not quite ready for a meeting Joe. What would people think?”

“I’ll tell you what, Bob. I’ll call Jim and ask him to pick you up. The only way you’re ever going to find out what people will think is to go to a meeting.”

“My name is Jim, and I’m an alcoholic. I’d like to introduce Bob. Bob isn’t sure whether he’s an alcoholic or not but he’s here to see what AA is all about. Stand up and tell them your first name, pal.”

“Hi, I’m Bob and I have a drinking problem.”

◦

A journey always begins with the first step. The people in attendance, there were about 150 give or take, all took a minute after the meeting to welcome Bob to the White House. Not one person in the room said anything about whether or not they thought Bob was an alcoholic. There were other ‘newcomers’ in the meeting as well. The newcomers don’t usually share at the White house in closed meetings. At least they didn’t when I went there. Lots of time, poor memory. BTW, I’m not Bob, but I know a lot of people named Bob. My name is Gary, and I AM an alcoholic. It took me a long time to learn to be able to say that and not feel less than.

I went to the White House for the first time in 1973. My sobriety date is January 2, 1999. Some people just don’t get it at first, I didn’t and I was my own worst enemy. I think that I get it now, one day at a time. AA has a lot of slogans. They help, if you let them. I suppose I could say something like, if only... What’s the difference, I’m sober now, today.

◦

“Coffee?”

“Yes, thanks, Joe. I went to a meeting and it wasn’t what I expected.”

“What did you expect?”

“I don’t really know, to tell you the truth. It was just a lot of regular people, most were friendly. Everyone said hello. Do you go there?”

“Every day. I catch the morning meeting before I open up.”

“What next?”

“It’s up to you Bob. Showered and shaved, huh? Did you eat?”

“I had breakfast and lunch. I read chapter one, Bill’s Story.”

“And?”

“Different circumstances, but it’s not a lot different in some ways from what happened to me.”

“You need to read the entire book, cover to cover. However, some people find that it helps to just read the first 164 pages. That is the Big Book proper. The rest of the book contains stories of other people and their struggles with alcoholism. The first story is called Dr. Bob’s Nightmare. Dr. Bob’s last name was Smith. Dr. William D. Silkworth wrote the Doctor’s opinion. To quote the Foreword, Dr. Silkworth was A New York specialist in alcoholism who is now accounted no less than a medical saint by AA members.”

“I might try a morning meeting too, if it’s ok.”

“Do you need a ride, or can you get there yourself?”

“I have a car, so I’ll get there myself.”

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“My name is Bob and I AM an alcoholic...”

## A Friend of Bill's – Chapter 4

Every coin has 2 sides and an edge. Now that we've talked about alcoholism, let's turn the coin over and look at the other side. It would be very nice if the drunk ran into a light pole when he was drunk and behind the wheel of his car. It may have a big powerful engine because he or she needs the boost to his or her ego. Cars with big powerful engines go fast. Especially when there's a drunk behind the wheel. They even go fast in the wrong lane of the freeway or the road. If the drunk ran into that light pole, it would probably be ok; drunks only occasionally get hurt in the accidents they cause. I can't explain it, but drunks usually aim for the car with the most people in it. You know the car with the family on their way to see the re-release of *War of the Worlds*.

The family gets killed, often, except perhaps for the kids in the back seat who have instantly become orphans. They charge the drunk with vehicular manslaughter or perhaps, murder. At the scene of the accident he's always the guy walking around glazed, saying, "What happened?"

In my life, I've had 2 accidents driving with a snootful. The first occurred when I was alone out in the middle of nowhere and the only person that got hurt was me. 4 stitches. The United States Air Force was very happy to allow for me to pay for the repairs to their Travel-All. \$525.53. The second occurred in 1987. The kid thought she was dying and had to go to the ER. I didn't think I was too drunk to drive 3 miles. The family car barely made it home and couldn't go 3 more miles without repairs.

The only other car was the state car. I got to the left turn lane in front of the hospital, no problem because I drove very carefully. I looked up, didn't see anything and began my left turn. The guy who was delivering pizzas had forgotten to turn on his headlights. But he had the pedal to the metal – he was running behind. He realized his mistake and turned on his lights. Only to see my family and me halfway through a turn into the hospital. I hit the gas and he hit the brakes. He said he was only going 40mph. He left 94' of skid marks and hit my car so hard that it broke his tiny Toyota pickup in half, shoved the passenger side of the state car in at least 30" and shoved the whole car 15' until it hit the curb. I got 2 tiny scratches. The ER picked out the two little pieces of glass and didn't even give me a Band-Aid. The daughter in the back seat was more frightened than hurt but they stitched her forehead and she doesn't have any scars.

The state car was a 4 door Chevy. The other guy hit the Chevy on the passenger side squarely on that damned post that had zero strength. Sharon had 5 broken ribs, a punctured lung, etc. They had to use the Jaws of Life to get her out of the car, or what was left of it. Bubba wasn't in charge of the accident investigation. The CHP was along with the LA County Sheriff was because there was a debate over jurisdiction. Both agencies investigated the accident thoroughly. The 300' ride from the corner to the ER cost \$1,200. They took Sharon to a trauma center in Lancaster.

Get this: I swallowed a bunch of something for my breath. I'm sure I still stunk like a brewery. The other guy was wearing his seatbelt and didn't get hurt. The police decided

I was sober and he was going 40mph. If you're going 30mph, you can stop a car in what, 66'? At 40, you should be able to do it in 100' or so. If I hadn't had a snootful, I might have seen his pickup, we'll never know. I thought the accident was his fault because of his of not having his headlights on. He seemed to agree, but no one admitted liability. He sued the state of Iowa and got \$35,000 for his used Toyota pickup. He didn't receive any medical attention because he didn't need any. That's not the point. The point is that the only people who got hurt were the innocent people. Do you know how much guilt weighs? It is very heavy. I got older and it didn't get any lighter, either. That was 18 years ago and the guilt still weighs a ton.

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"How are you doing, Bob, missed you in the meetings, coffee?"

"Am I 86'd?"

"You want a beer? Bob, you look like you could use a cup of coffee. Have it first and if you still want the beer I'll buy you one myself."

"Ok."

"So what happened? You looked like you were doing pretty good."

"I guess I thought that I had it all figured out. I got that job and couldn't make the morning meetings. A lot of nights they had me working overtime and I needed the money. That kept me from going to the evening meetings."

"That's why they have meetings 7 days a week, Bob. Who's your sponsor?"

"I never got one."

"Did you finish reading the Big Book?"

"I did, but I didn't understand everything."

"And you didn't have a sponsor to talk to for an explanation of what you didn't understand, right?"

"Right."

"Bob you could have gone to a Saturday meeting and asked anyone. You could have come here and asked me, I'm open 6 days a week until at least midnight."

"Working all of those hours had me pretty tired."

“You’re going to need to get a sponsor. He’s your AA friend with some experience in the program that knows the answers to your questions or knows where to find the answer. Now, tomorrow is Saturday, how about I pick you up and we go to the morning meeting at the White House?”

“How can I go back there? I relapsed.”

“Bob, they’ll say *Welcome Back* and then want to visit with you to learn why you went out. I’m going to ask you to share and explain what happened. We all need to know, that helps us from going out. The only reason they’ll ask is so that whatever you did wrong, they can avoid doing themselves. But, I already know why you went out. You stopped going to meetings. I know you often hear the same stories over and over, but you’ll have to admit, some of the fellas and gals make their stories pretty entertaining.”

“Some of them are funnier than the Comedy Club.”

“It wasn’t funny to them at the time. But they have time and they’ve learned to laugh at the really stupid things they did.”

“You know, I’ve never gotten into my car and driven while I was drinking. I think I credit Julie with that. She was so adamant about drunks and drunk drivers. Her Dad probably got busted for drunk driving a half dozen times.”

“Still want that beer?”

“I’ll take a Coke Classic, thanks.”

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“Bob, we haven’t seen you in a while. Go out did you?”

“How did you know?”

“I didn’t. However, you didn’t have a sponsor and I hadn’t seen you in meetings for a while. When a newcomer stops coming to meetings, it means that they’re going somewhere else for meetings or are setting themselves up to go out. I go to every meeting in the area because I have the time. I didn’t see you at any of the other meetings either. You ought to ask Joe to be your sponsor. Let me warn you, however, he’ll tell that he won’t be your sponsor but will be your friend. Take it. If you work a good program, one of these days you’ll overhear him saying, *I sponsor Bob*.”

“Thanks, I’ll talk to him.”

“Started your inventory yet?”

“No. You know, I didn’t start drinking until 2001. I never drove drunk and I never hurt anyone besides myself.”

“The longer you drank, the more you have to put in an inventory. However, an inventory is more than just what you did to others and need to make amends for. Step 4 says, ‘Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.’ That’s not limited to what we did to other people, you know. It may include things done to us. We make amends to other people for the wrongs we’ve done them, that’s steps 8 and 9. It also includes forgiving others for what they’ve done to us. Carrying around a resentment is a sure fire way to set yourself to go out again.”

“I don’t see how I can ever forgive those terrorists on Flight 11.”

“Nobody said it would be easy. Are you a Christian?”

“Catholic.”

“Right. So what did God tell us to do? He told us to forgive people for what they’ve done to us. The Grace is in the forgiving.”

“I’ll never forget.”

“No one is asking you to forget. But you should remember the good times you had with your family. Those are the precious memories. How they died are the bad memories you need to set aside.”

“I don’t suppose you’d be my sponsor, would you, Bill?”

“You suppose right, Bob. I haven’t sponsored anyone in a few years now. I would like to but I have a few too many health issues. I’ll be your friend and you can talk to me any time about anything. That’s how this thing works. Like I suggested, ask Joe to be your sponsor. If he totally declines, you might ask Jim.”

“Have you had breakfast?”

“Just coffee. I was planning on getting something to eat after the meeting.”

“Well, Bob, there’s this place that has a really good menu that I eat at every morning. Let’s go get something to eat. Have a nice visit with Bill?”

“Oh yes, very nice. He told me that I had to get a sponsor.”

“Everyone needs a sponsor.”

“He suggested that I ask you.”



"I'm pretty selective about who I sponsor. I don't want to waste my time on anyone who isn't serious. No, I won't be your sponsor, but I'll be your friend."

"That's good enough for me."

"I recommend the steak and eggs. Every night after you've eaten I want you to come by the bar. We'll have a cup of coffee and visit. I want you to catch a meeting on Saturdays and Sundays and any evening you don't have to work late. Give me a call from the Club and I'll know not to expect you."

"Ok."

"Do you have a 12 and 12?"

"What's that?"

"The full title is Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. You're going to need one to understand the 12 steps and what AA is really about."

"I'll pick one up at the meeting tomorrow."

"Do you know about H and I?"

"I heard someone mention it, what is it?"

"Hospitals and Institutions Committee. They're the people who got to the jails, prisons, hospitals and institutions to carry the message. Do you have any idea how many people end up in jail or prison because they were drinking at the time they committed their crime?"

"Lots?"

"Right. I have an H & I panel once a month and it meets tomorrow night. I would like it very much if you went along to observe."

"Jim told me that that's how he got into AA for good."

"Jim works a good program, when he works it."

"I'll have steak and eggs, hash browns and wheat toast, honey."

"I'll have the same thing, please."

"Nice butt on that waitress."

"You're right."

“I look, but I don’t touch, you know.”

“Why not Joe, you’re not so old?”

“My wife died of cancer. I’ve never met anyone who could measure up to her. We were married 30 years.”

“Must have been tough.”

“I hired a bartender and went to evening meetings as well as morning meetings after she died. It wasn’t the same as having my Mary, but it kept me sober.”

“Bill said that I needed to forgive those terrorists who hijacked Flight 11.”

“Let’s just work on the steps in order, Bob. You can think about that, but wait until you make your inventory. You have to work the steps in the order they’re in to get the real benefit.”

“The front part isn’t so bad either, is it Joe?”

Note: Alcoholics might not all be dirty old men, but they are astute observers. There is nothing wrong with my eyes. I love to observe the packaging, nothing more, now. However, I’ve never noticed many ladies looking back. The only ones that ever did were trouble spelled with a capital T. I am a very slow learner. The man who thought that all alcoholics were weak willed SOB’s was my father. I guess he should have known. He said that our family was dysfunctional. He was right, but that doesn’t excuse me not getting help sooner. If you want to talk, email me. Or, drop a \$10 bill – the number is 661-285-8501. I’m sort of long winded...

“Nope. She’s happily married and has 3 kids. She worked in a truck stop for a long time. She sometimes flirts, but don’t take her seriously.”

“Thanks Joanne.”

“Get a good look, Joe?”

“This is Bob. Bob is an astute observer too.”

“Looking is free. Touching might get you killed, Bob.”

“Joe said you were happily married with 3 kids.”

“Very happily married. My husband is 6’3 and looks like Tom Cruise. He’s a body builder.”

“I’ll be good.”

“As long as you know the ground rules...”

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“I’m glad I went to that H & I meeting tonight. Man, talk about people with a challenge to overcome.”

“Some of them will get into the program after they get out and clean up their act. The rest only think they’re ready. It gets them out of their cells for 2 hours so they come to the meetings.”

“I got that 12 & 12 at the meeting this morning.”

“Good. Read it. It will explain a lot about the program. You’ll still have questions and that’s why you have an AA friend. If I don’t know the answers, I’ll call someone who does.”

“Why do I get the feeling that this thing is easier said than done?”

“Experience, for one thing, you went out. Those THIQ’s I mentioned are still in your brain. As soon as you drink again, you’ll activate them and be right back where you left off. It will take time for your liver to heal, too. You don’t get to start over from the beginning. Ever.”

“I sure made a mess of my life.”

“We all did. All of that time I could have spent with Mary and didn’t. Oh, well.”

## A Friend of Bill's – Epilogue

This was never intended to be a long story. I'm not preaching. Some 10% or more of the population of the United States is an alcoholic. Not all of those 10% go to AA. Some are sober by other means, including practice of a faith. Some people just quit and never take another drink. My mother was an alcoholic who never admitted it and never went to AA. One day, after she ended up in the hospital for the umpteenth time, the doctor said, "Doris you have to stop drinking. If you take another drink, it will kill you."

My mother switched from beer to iced tea and never took another drink. She was a non-drinking alcoholic for the next 14 years until her death. She drank iced tea exactly the way she'd drunk beer. When, in 1992, my younger and only brother died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, she began to mourn his death and died 6 months later, apparently of emphysema. Her real cause of death was grief, parents are supposed to die before their children do. My father also had a problem with alcohol, but he wasn't one of us. Or, maybe, he was just too strong willed of a man. When he realized that he was spending too much time at the Elks Club, he stopped drinking heavily and was able to drink socially, supposedly. Gayle always claimed that Dad always drank about one too many drinks.

I started in AA in 1973 and got sober in 1999. Ron started in AA in 1962 and got sober in 1992, when he had a heart attack and died. Clarence took 4 years to finally sober up after he decided to do so. Every alcoholic has a story. They usually aren't pretty but sometimes they not as bad as other peoples' stories. I knew I was an alcoholic from 1973, but was too ashamed and too stubborn to admit it. In my case, I finally just got sick and tired of being sick and tired. Still, it took me from May 30, 1995 until the morning of January 1, 1999 to realize that I couldn't take another drink, ever.

During that period, I was sober 99% of the time. I had 30 months before I went out the first time. After that, I was a periodic drinker, drinking only once about every 5 months and rarely drinking enough to get drunk. In fact, I only drank enough to get drunk 3 times in the period from May 30, 1995 to January 1, 1999. The very last time I drank, after midnight on January 1st, I didn't get drunk. I did, however, have my fill.

Most of the characters in this story, with the exception of Bob, are based on real people. Peggy's is a real tavern near Drake University and Boots owned the place in 1965. Boots really did, unless I am terribly mistaken, learn about the Dram shop laws the hard way. The White House is just that, a big old white 3-story house. They have good AA there.

The Beginning...

BTW, Bob had \$12,000,000 plus accrued interest in his investment account.

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